

Healthwatch Quarterly Impact & Activity Report

Quarter 3: October to December 2025

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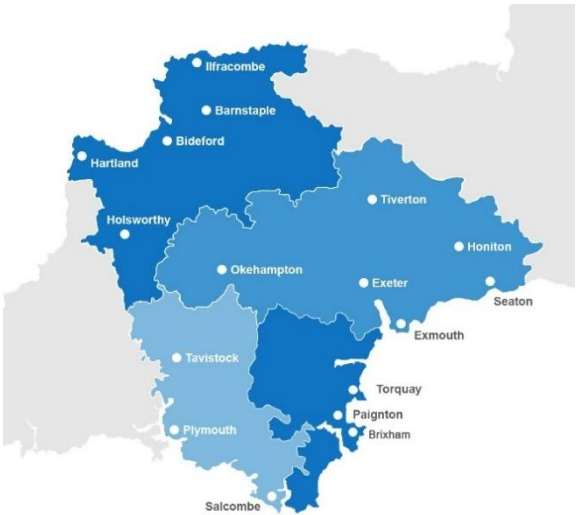
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About Us

Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay (HWDPT) are your local health and social care champions.

We're here to speak up for the 1.2 million people in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay, making sure NHS leaders and other decision-makers hear their voices and use their feedback to improve care. We can also help them find reliable, trustworthy information and advice.

We offer dedicated walk-in centres in Torbay and Plymouth, and in wider Devon 'Healthwatch Champions' are located at Citizens Advice offices based throughout the county to carry out Healthwatch core functions.



About this report

This report details our key activities for the last quarter, including how we have engaged with the public, a summary of the feedback we have collected, our reports, recommendations and any outcomes or impact achieved.

Quarter at a glance



We've met **hundreds** of local people at community events across Devon, Plymouth & Torbay



Social media users have seen our posts nearly **20,000** times with almost **2,500** people seeing our Email Bulletins



Nearly **10,000** people visited our dedicated website – www.hwdpt.org



We have escalated or referred **106** of your complaints or concerns to the relevant organisations



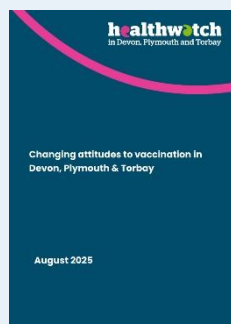
325 of you have shared your health or care feedback with us this quarter



We've helped **238** of you share your feedback or look for advice through our contact centre



We've released **4 new reports** on various health and care issues available to read online by [clicking here](#)



Over **2,000** people read our news & reports online via: www.hwdpt.org/news-and-reports



Our News in Brief



A snapshot of some of our main activities during the past three months

Living with Multiple Sclerosis in Devon and Torbay

We published a new insight report exploring the experiences of people living with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) across Devon and Torbay, drawing on feedback shared through our 'Have your Say' channels, focus groups and an online survey.

People consistently described unequal experiences of care, with particular challenges around obtaining a diagnosis, long waits to start treatment, inconsistent follow-up and poor communication. Many told us these delays had a significant emotional and physical impact, contributing to anxiety, uncertainty and deteriorating wellbeing.

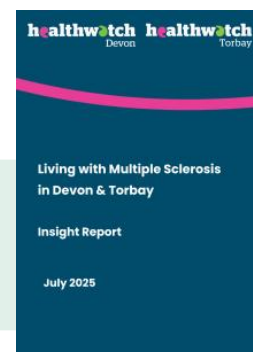
Key Findings

- Diagnosis pathways are inconsistent, with some people waiting far longer than others
- Delays to treatment following diagnosis are common
- Ongoing care and annual reviews are not delivered consistently
- Communication with clinicians varies widely, leaving patients unclear about next steps

Our recommendations

- Standardise diagnostic processes for MS, with clearer expectations on time from symptoms to diagnosis
- Adopt a 12-week benchmark for treatment initiation following diagnosis
- Ensure annual comprehensive reviews are routinely offered to all patients
- Investigate and address regional differences in MS care quality.

Impact : The findings and recommendations have been shared with system partners to support service improvement. The report strengthens the case for more consistent pathways and provides clear, evidence-based insight into how delays and variation in care affect people living with MS day to day. [Click here](#) to read the complete report.



Patient Experience of Using the Royal Eye Infirmary

Healthwatch Plymouth published a new report examining patient and carer experiences at the Royal Eye Infirmary (REI) at University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust. Based on feedback from 59 people, the report explores whether changes introduced since the move to the new site have improved the patient journey.

While patients consistently praised staff for being caring, helpful and professional, the report highlights a clear divide in experience between people with good vision and those living with sight loss or additional vulnerabilities.

Key Findings

- Visually impaired patients experienced difficulties with signage, wayfinding and hearing their name called
- Travel, parking availability and costs remain major barriers for many
- Long waits without updates caused anxiety, particularly for those reliant on public transport
- Some patients experienced delays, missed letters or difficulty contacting the service by phone

Trust response and outcomes

University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust welcomed the findings and provided a detailed response. They have committed to:

- Reviewing patient letters, appointment information and website content for accuracy and accessibility
- Improving telephone responsiveness and exploring enhanced call-handling systems
- Reassessing the 10-minute check-in window to avoid disadvantaging some patients
- Increasing volunteer support in reception and waiting areas
- Working with local sight loss groups to improve signage, contrast, lighting and wayfinding.

Impact : This work builds on earlier Healthwatch engagement, including changes to pedestrian access and transport links, and continues to shape improvements to accessibility and patient experience at the REI. [Click here](#) to read the report.

Exploring Reasonable Adjustments in Torbay

Healthwatch Torbay published a new insight report examining how reasonable adjustments are working in practice for people with disabilities who use health and care services in Torbay. The report is based on feedback from 70 individuals and groups, supported by case studies and national learning from other local Healthwatch organisations.

The findings show that while tools and processes often exist, reasonable adjustments are not always identified, recorded or acted upon consistently, despite clear legal duties.

Key Findings

- Hospital passports and digital flags are not always used or understood
- Small, person-centred adjustments can make a significant difference
- Staff training improves experiences but is not consistent across services
- Poor communication increases distress, particularly during crises
- Transitions from children's to adult services remain a key pressure point

Our recommendations

- Review how reasonable adjustments are identified, recorded and delivered
- Improve awareness and consistent use of hospital passports and digital flags
- Embed person-centred, consistent practice across services

Impact : Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust welcomed the findings and recognised opportunities for practical improvement, including clearer signposting and reducing sensory overload. The report aligns with NHS guidance and the Devon LeDeR programme and is being used to support service-level learning and improvement..

[Click here](#) to read the report.



Lived Experience of Accessing North Devon District Hospital

Healthwatch Devon published a lived experience walkthrough report exploring how accessible and welcoming North Devon District Hospital is for people with cognitive and communication challenges. The walkthrough was carried out alongside Headway North Devon and focused on physical spaces, communication, signage, staff support and the role of carers.

Participants shared rich, practical insight into how hospital environments can feel overwhelming and confusing, and what helps people feel safe, supported and understood.

Key themes

- Limited awareness of hospital passports and digital flags
- Carers play a vital role but need clearer guidance and recognition
- Wayfinding and signage can be confusing or overwhelming
- Sensory environments, including noise and lighting, can cause distress
- Hospital volunteers were highly valued for their visibility and support

Recommendations and response

The report highlights achievable actions, including improving signage, widening access to hospital passports, reducing sensory overload and ensuring staff and agency workers receive appropriate training.

The hospital's Learning Disability Team welcomed the findings and recognised several recommendations as clear and deliverable improvements.

Impact : The report provides a strong lived-experience evidence base to support ongoing work to improve accessibility and inclusion for patients and carers at North Devon District Hospital. [Click here](#) to read the report or [click here](#) to watch a short film from the walkthrough, featuring real patient feedback.



Healthwatch Network News



A snapshot of some of our national partner Healthwatch England's news, briefings and reports during the past three months

About Healthwatch England

Healthwatch was established under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 on a national and local level. Healthwatch England (HWE) are a statutory committee of the independent regulator the Care Quality Commission (CQC). HWE escalate local Healthwatch concerns to CQC and provide advice to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, NHS England and local authorities. There are 152 independent local Healthwatch set up across each local authority in England.

Healthwatch England Key Reports and Briefings this Quarter

Referrals: improving experiences and closing “black holes” – Healthwatch England found 1 in 7 people (14%) experienced a referral being delayed, lost, rejected or not processed – with most needing to chase updates themselves. Over 1 in 10 (12%) were still waiting for confirmation, meaning they may not appear on official waiting lists. The report calls for clear referral standards, confirmation within a week, better information at the point of referral and improved tracking – backed by investment in admin capacity. [Read the report here.](#)

Urgent dental care – Healthwatch England's research explains how urgent dental care is increasingly being used as a substitute for routine NHS dentistry, with people reporting long waits, inconsistent pathways and limited treatment options. It highlights rising demand via NHS 111 and warns that without clearer access routes, consistent commissioning and transparent tracking of additional urgent appointments, many patients will remain stuck in cycles of pain, repeat urgent visits and financial hardship. [Read the blog here](#)

Parents of children with SEND – This blog brings together what parents are telling Healthwatch about the struggle to secure joined-up support for children with SEND across education, health and care. Themes include delays (including for EHC plans), gaps in mental health support, inconsistent transitions into adult services, and a lack of SEND-informed practice in some healthcare settings. The blog reinforces the need for better integration between local services so families are supported rather than repeatedly signposted. [Read the blog here.](#)

State of Care 2024–25 – The Care Quality Commission's annual State of Care report warns that ambitions to shift more care out of hospital will fail without major investment in community capacity. It also highlights the need for genuine co-production with local communities as systems develop neighbourhood health hubs. The report flags long waits for community mental health support and rising emergency readmissions within 30 days – often linked to poor discharge planning, particularly for older people. [Read the full report here.](#)

Impact : New analysis shows NHS written complaints rose to 256,777 in 2024–25, the highest on record and a 24% increase over the past decade. Yet Healthwatch England warns this is only the “tip of the iceberg”. While 24% of people experienced poor care, just 9% made a formal complaint, often due to fear of repercussions or low confidence that services would act. The findings strengthen calls for urgent reform of the NHS complaints system, including clearer accountability, faster responses and stronger advocacy support. [Read more here.](#)



Our Engagement Activity

Some of the ways we have engaged with our communities this quarter

The last three months have seen us take our information stands out into the community and attend events in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay, capturing experiences of local health and social care along the way.

Selected events where we have been raising awareness of Healthwatch, gathering feedback and taking the opportunity to discuss & share issues or experiences include:

healthwatch Devon

- North Devon District Hospital
- Teignbridge Community Support events
- Libraries in Princetown, Holsworthy, Totnes, Okehampton, Newton Abbot & Tavistock
- Tavistock Community Wellbeing Fair

healthwatch Plymouth

- Derriford Hospital Drop-in
- Plymouth Royal Eye Infirmary
- Care Home Lay Visiting

healthwatch Torbay

- Torbay Hospital Drop-In
- Paignton Community Hub & Paignton Library.
- SEND Pledge Engagement Event

Coming up next quarter : we are planning to attend many more outreach locations in Devon, Plymouth & Torbay, keeping you updated via our eBulletin and local website: www.hwdpt.org



Listening locally: community engagement across Devon

During the last quarter, Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay focused on consistent, place-based engagement, meeting people where they already access support and services. Through a programme of library drop-ins, hospital sessions and community events, we gathered real-time feedback about access to care, communication, reasonable adjustments and lived experience of services.

Our teams held regular library drop-ins across Devon, including Newton Abbot, Tavistock, Totnes, Okehampton, Holsworthy and Princetown, providing opportunities for people to share experiences in familiar, accessible settings. We also attended community wellbeing and support events, including Teignbridge community support sessions and unpaid carers' information events, ensuring feedback from carers and people with additional needs was heard.

In Plymouth, we continued public drop-ins at Derriford Hospital, speaking directly with patients and visitors about hospital care, access and communication. Alongside this, we took part in multi-agency Health & Wellbeing Alliance meetings, strengthening relationships with local partners and ensuring community insight informed wider system discussions.

This engagement directly informed several reports published during the quarter, including work on Multiple Sclerosis care, patient experience at the Royal Eye Infirmary, and reasonable adjustments.



Healthwatch Feedback

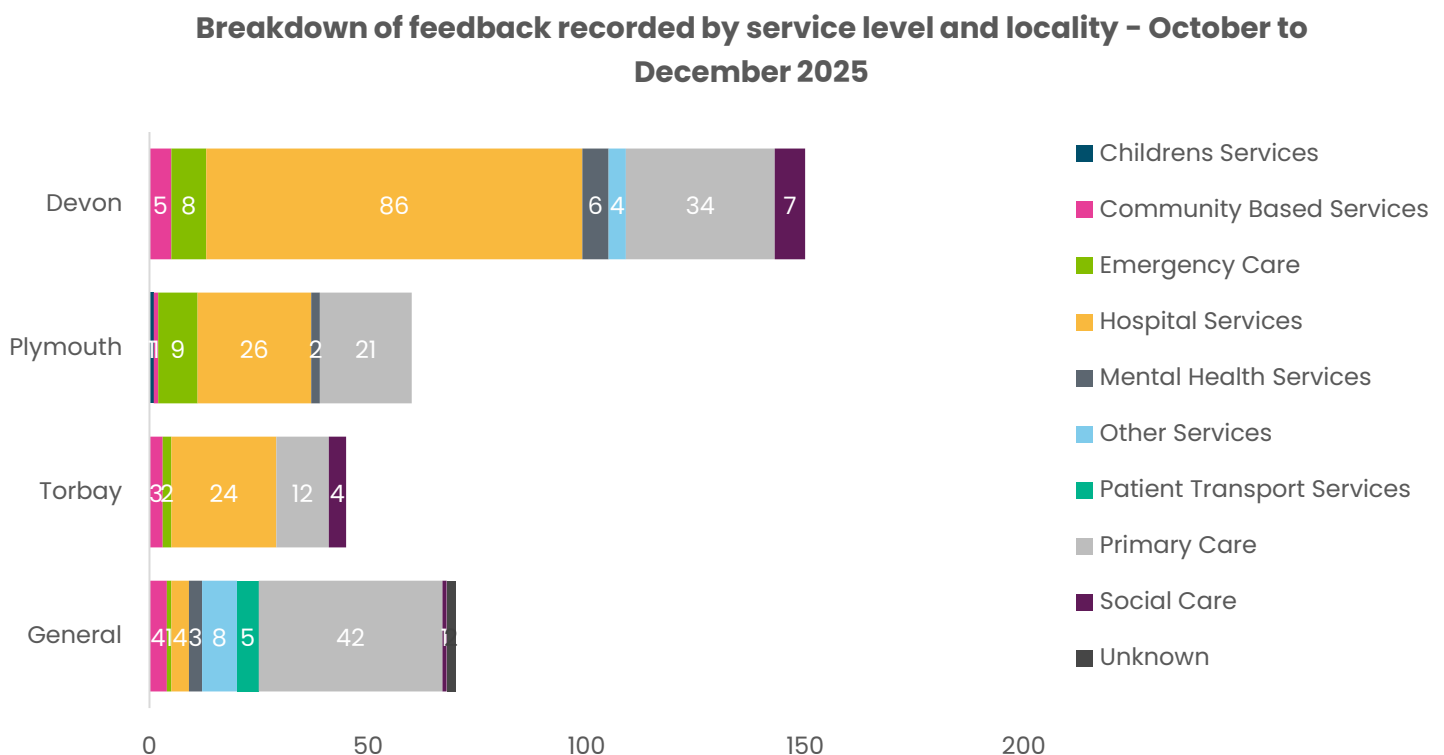
Where we gathered your experiences from in the past three months

Number of experiences shared with Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay

325 people contacted Healthwatch to share their experiences of health and social care services in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay. 150 were about services in Devon, 60 about Plymouth services and 45 about Torbay services. 70 experiences were either general about services across the whole of Devon, Plymouth, and Torbay, or their location was unknown.

28 of these experiences were shared with us at HWDPT through our online Have Your Say form, 238 were handled by our contact centre and 59 experiences were captured through online or community engagement.

Source of Feedback shared with HWDPT and Type of Service



Of these shared experiences gathered across Devon, Plymouth and Torbay, the most commonly discussed theme was **Hospital Services**.

Feedback about Primary Care Services

109 experiences (33.5% of overall feedback) were about primary care services, of those:

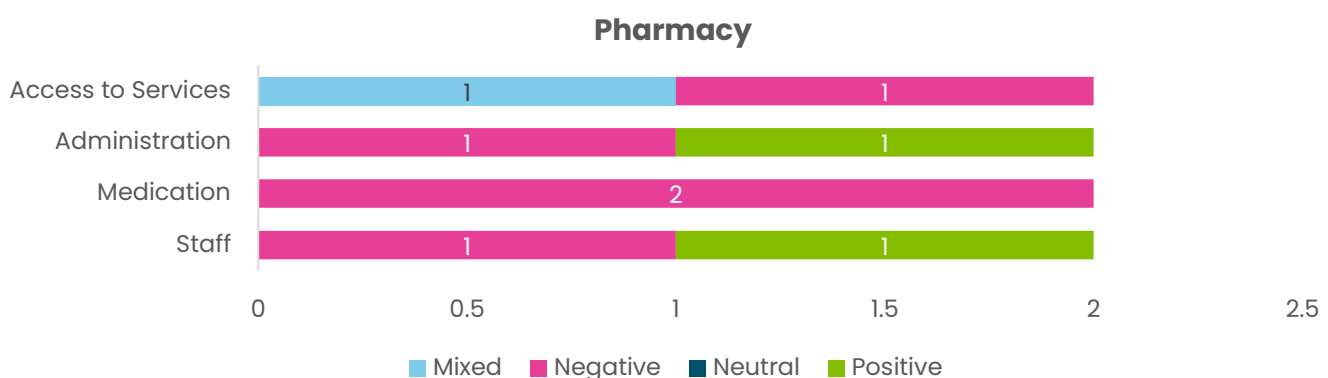
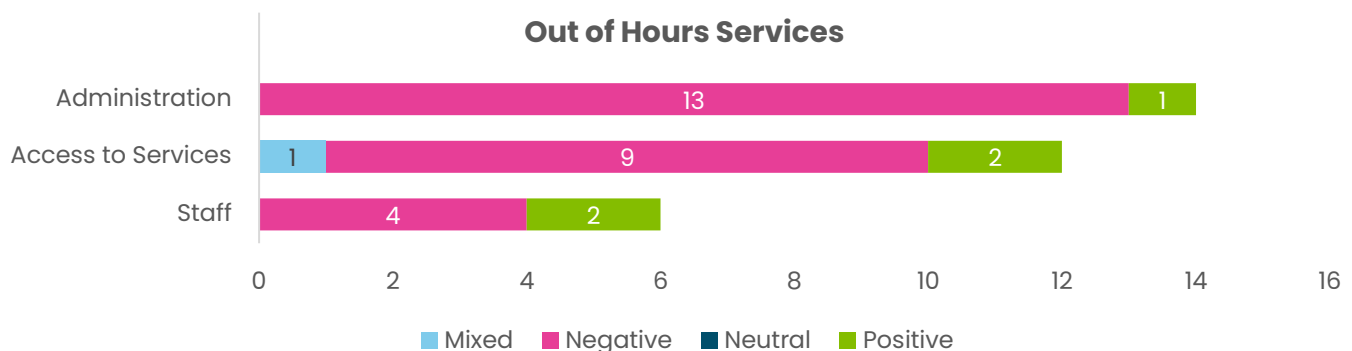
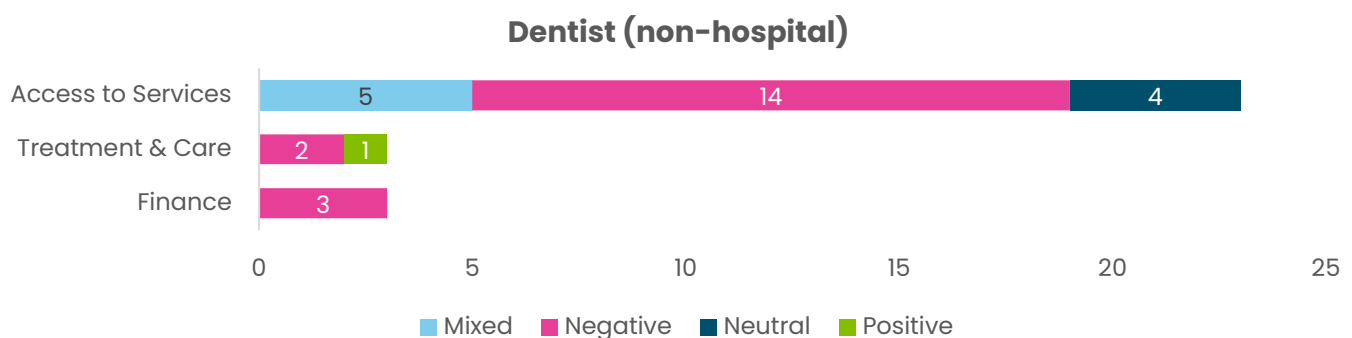
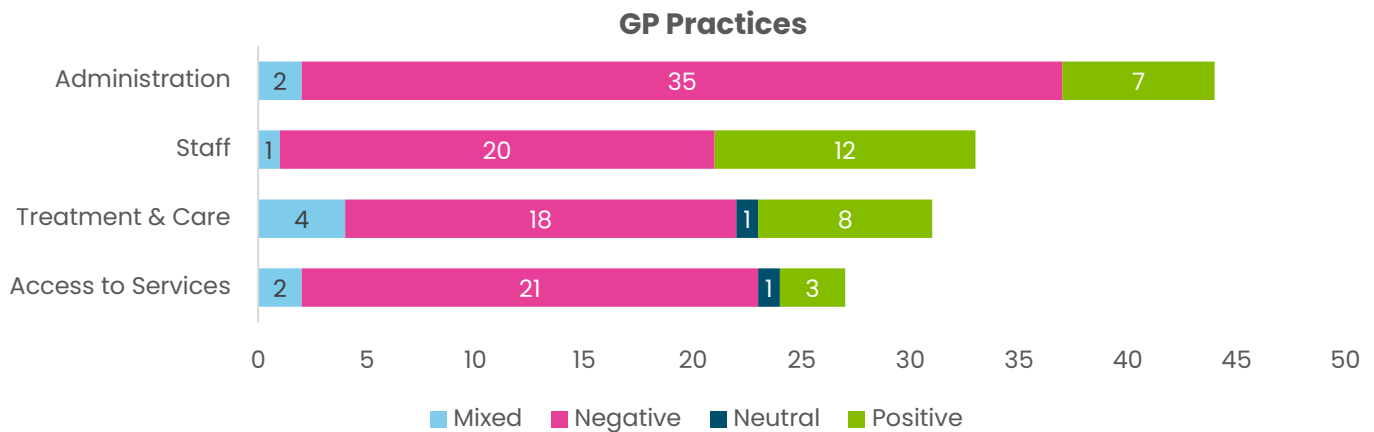
- 73 experiences related to GP Services
- 19 experiences related to Dental Services
- 14 experiences related to Out of Hours Services
- 3 experiences related to Pharmacy Services.



Feedback about Primary Care Services (continued)

The most common themes in relation to Primary Care Services were **Access to Services**, **Administration** and **Treatment & Care**.

The charts below show summaries of these themes and how the public felt about the Primary Care Services they told us about across Devon, Plymouth and Torbay, separated by the type of service, over the past three months:



PLEASE NOTE: Each piece of feedback may have multiple themes, hence any disparity between number of experiences and number of themes within the charts.



Feedback about Hospital Services

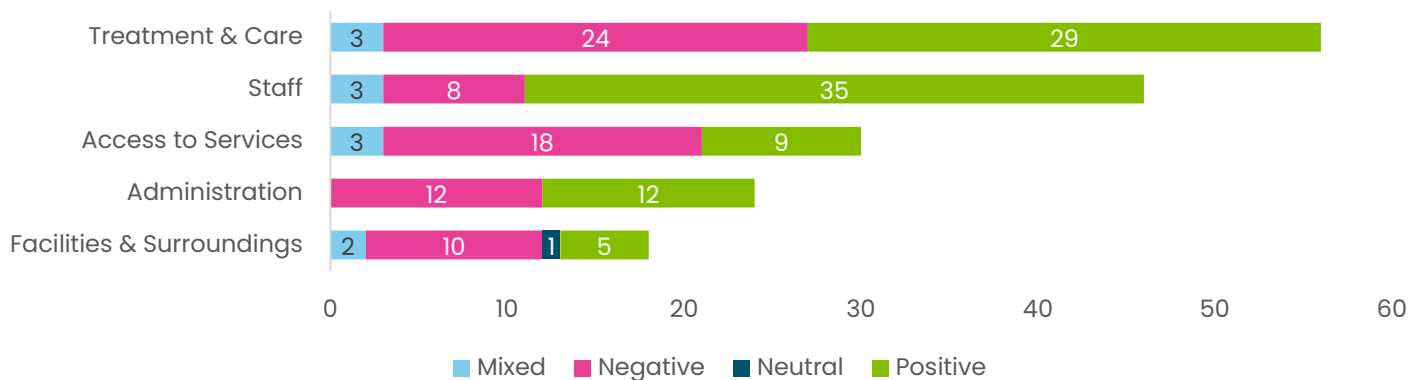
140 experiences (43.1% of overall feedback) were about hospital services. Of those:

- 86 experiences related to hospital services in Devon
- 26 experiences related to hospital services in Plymouth
- 24 experiences related to hospital services in Torbay
- 4 experiences related to hospital services whose location was unknown.

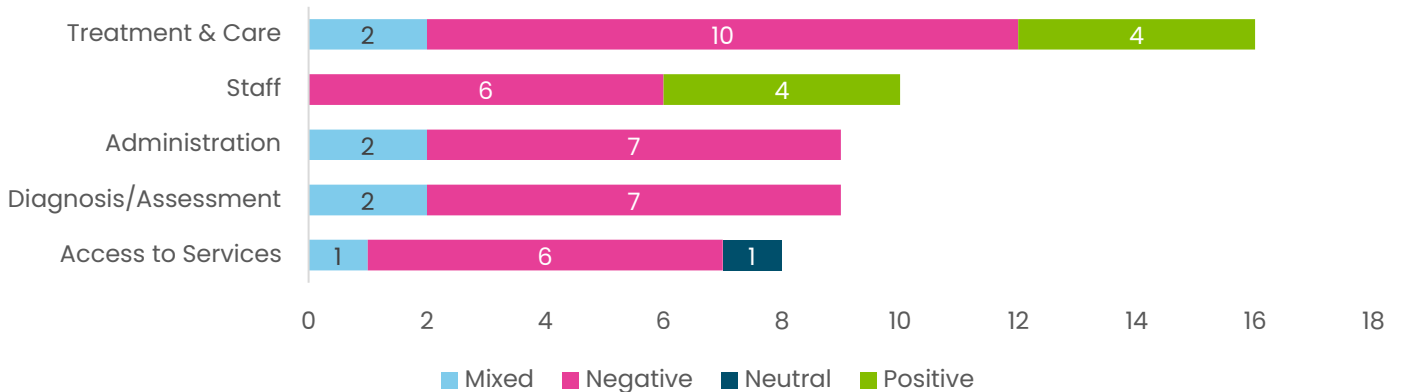
The most common themes overall in relation to Hospital Services were **Treatment & Care**, **Access to Services**, and **Staff**.

The charts below shows how the public felt about the Hospital Services across Devon, Plymouth and Torbay, separated by the type the theme and sentiment, over the past three months:

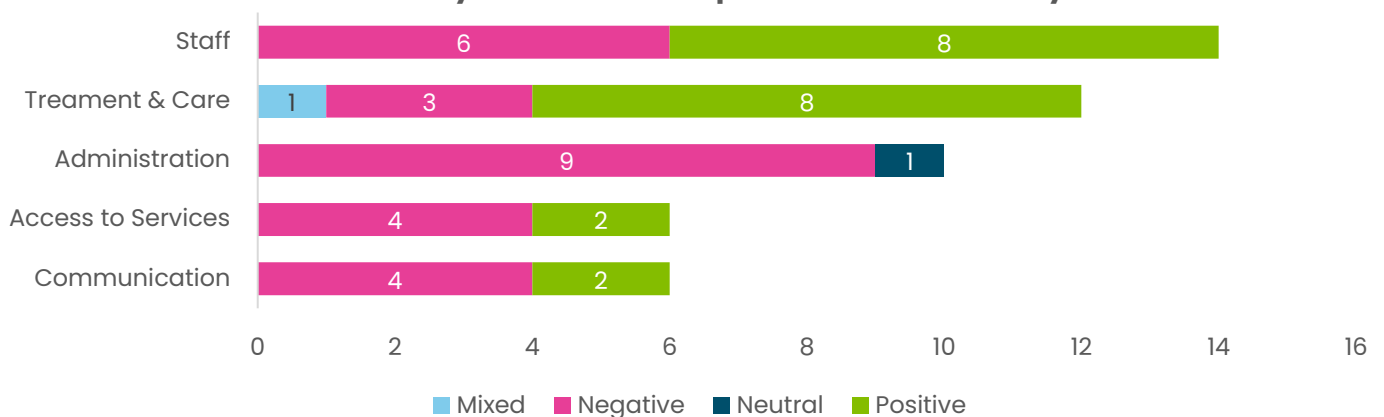
Summary of themes – Hospital Services in Devon



Summary of themes – Hospital Services in Plymouth



Summary of themes – Hospital Services in Torbay





Healthwatch Case Studies

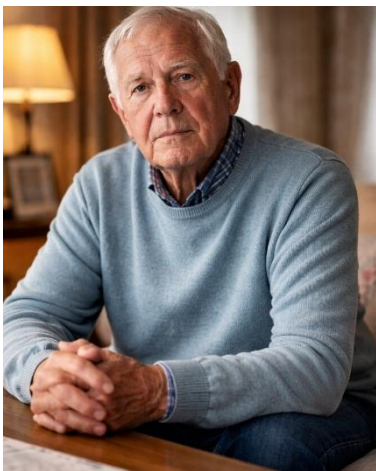
Your experiences of local health and social care in your words

This page shows a case study this quarter from each of Devon, Plymouth and Torbay, related to the feedback analysis on the previous pages. **PLEASE NOTE:** All client's names and photographs have been replaced to protect their identities.

Safety Risks Fixed for Families with Newborns

Emma from Plymouth attended a postnatal midwife appointment at a local family hub with her newborn. During the visit, she became worried about safety and hygiene. Building work was happening inside and outside the hub, with no clear barriers. Children could reach paint and tools, strong paint fumes filled the waiting area, and power tools were used near the entrance. Inside the clinic room, there was no soap or hand sanitiser, and proper hand hygiene was not followed. Emma felt this put babies, parents and staff at risk and left her anxious during an already stressful time.

What we did – We raised the concerns with Plymouth City Council and NHS Devon. This led to updated risk assessments, action with contractors, and reminders to staff about safety and infection control.



Pain Complaint Finally Acknowledged

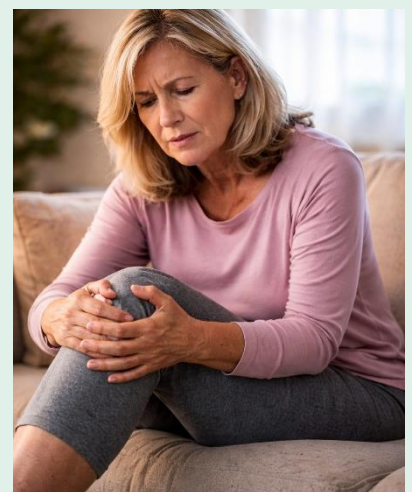
David from Torbay contacted Healthwatch after submitting a formal complaint about the care his late wife received. He had not received any response and felt ignored during an incredibly difficult time. David believed changes to pain medication were not handled safely and did not follow national guidance. His wife was left in severe pain for months, which caused distress for both of them. David felt these decisions may have contributed to her death and wanted answers, accountability and recognition of what his family had experienced.

What we did – We escalated the concerns directly to Torbay Hospital's PALS team. As a result, PALS contacted David to discuss the complaint, explain next steps and ensure his concerns were formally addressed.

Injury Taken Seriously after complaint raised

Rachel from South Devon badly injured her knee after a fall and was later left in pain for weeks without the right support. Her physiotherapist urgently contacted the GP and shared photos showing serious swelling and infection, but this was not acted on. Rachel was repeatedly told to rest and wait, despite worsening symptoms. She felt dismissed, unsupported and distressed. By the time she returned to hospital, doctors said earlier referral could have avoided weeks of pain. She eventually needed urgent surgery and a long recovery, which affected both her physical and mental wellbeing.

What we did – We advised Rachel on how to make a formal complaint and access advocacy support. After meeting the practice manager, the surgery accepted the feedback and committed to improving how similar cases are handled in future.



Impact : We regularly share all of your stories and our intelligence with key stakeholders, including health & social care providers & commissioners, the Devon Integrated Care Partnership Board, our local authorities, Local Care Partnerships and the voluntary sector. We also share our data with the Care Quality Commission and Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.



What we did with your views

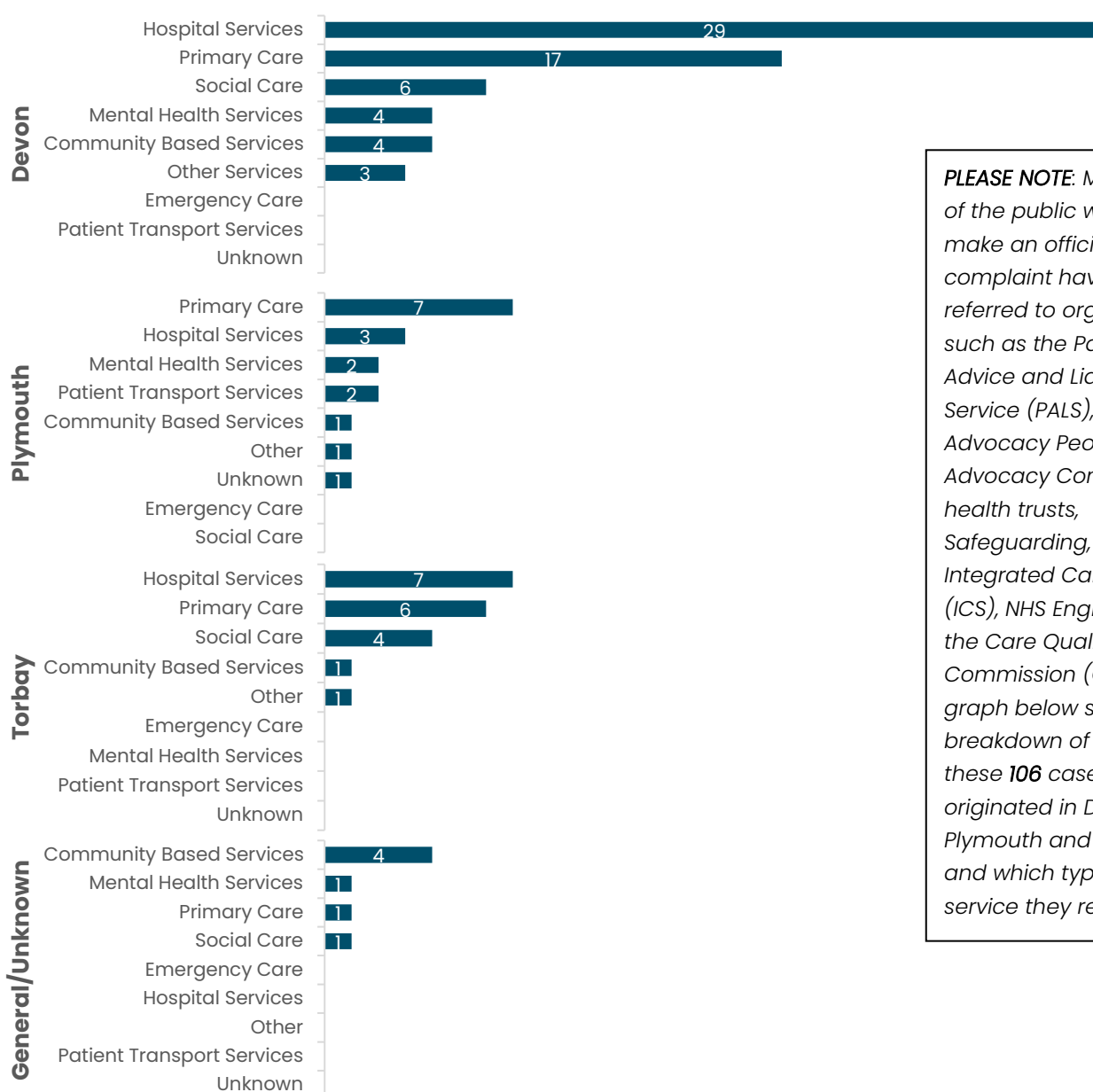
Where we escalated your concerns and complaints

Impact : Escalations and Referrals

All public feedback we receive is logged in our secure system for further analysis. This includes working with other local organisations to gather feedback such as Citizen's Advice, Community Trusts and Community Hubs. Some are serious concerns or complaints that need to be escalated further for immediate action. This quarter there have been **106** such cases. Of these:

- 28 were provided with advice and information by the contact centre,
- 25 were referred to a Healthwatch Champion,
- 9 were signposted/referred to PALS,
- 9 were signposted/referred to an advocacy service,
- 18 were signposted other services (community support, information services),
- 16 were signposted/escalated to the provider
- 1 was escalated to Adult Safeguarding

Breakdown of the service level in each locality where commentator required advice, information or signposting to another service



PLEASE NOTE: Members of the public wanting to make an official complaint have been referred to organisations such as the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS), the Advocacy People, Devon Advocacy Consortium, health trusts, Safeguarding, the Devon Integrated Care System (ICS), NHS England and the Care Quality Commission (CQC). The graph below shows a breakdown of where these **106** cases originated in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay and which type of service they referred to.



Our Current Priorities

How your feedback shapes our local priorities in the community

All your feedback is used to inform us on the specific priorities we should be focussing on when working with local health and social care organisations. Currently our key priorities are:

1. Using technology to help people access services at home.
2. Helping people access social care services and care homes.
3. Improving and joining up services for children and young people.
4. Making sure all patients can access health services equally.
5. Helping people access mental health services for conditions like depression.
6. Helping people access GP, hospital and mental health services. GP means family doctor.
7. How cost of living affects people's health and wellbeing.

Coming Up Next Quarter

Some of our other engagement work set to be completed and shared next quarter :

healthwatch Devon

- Drop-in sessions at various outreach locations such as libraries in Newton Abbot, Tavistock, Totnes, Holsworthy, Princetown, and Okehampton.
- Exploration of expanded Care Home Lay Visiting in Devon.
- Support NHS Devon with service redesign engagement.

healthwatch Plymouth

- Derriford Hospital Drop-ins.
- Care Home Lay Visiting across the whole of Plymouth.
- Urgent treatment services at Derriford Hospital and follow up work with the Royal Eye Infirmary.

healthwatch Torbay

- Torbay Hospital Drop-Ins.
- Drop-in sessions at Paignton Community Hub.
- Engaging with people to gather public feedback regarding the potential impact of proposed changes to hospital cardiac service deployment in Devon.

Other Healthwatch Reports or Campaigns Coming Soon

- Healthwatch England will be publishing further national research and campaigns on priority issues including GP referrals, urgent dental care, men's health, SEND, patient transport and the use of AI and digital tools in healthcare, building on public insight gathered across England.
- Across the region, we will be examining the public's perception of digital health apps and online services to identify barriers to uptake, user benefits and difficulties.
- In Plymouth we will be continuing our Care Home Lay Visiting Project.
- Updates on all forthcoming reports and campaigns will be shared via our website and e-bulletins via www.hwdpt.org.

Impact : What we do with this report

We publicise this report on our website, email bulletin and various social media channels. We share it with key stakeholders, including health and social care providers & commissioners, the NHS Devon Integrated Care Partnership Board, our local authorities, Local Care Partnerships and the voluntary, community or social enterprise sector. We also share this report with the Care Quality Commission and Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level. For more information, please contact us using our contact details on the right.

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healthwatch
in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay

Our vision

A place where we can all get the health and care we need.

Our mission

To make sure people's experiences help make health and care better.